



Number Three

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POWELTON VILLAGE: AREA ON THE MEND

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — The neighborhood known as Powelton Village seemed to have a one-way ticket to the slums three years ago, but today its destination is reversed.

The thanks go primarily to two groups: the Powelton Village Development Associates, Inc., a real estate company which, in addition to the normal functions of such a group, improves run-down properties, and Powelton Neighbors, a non-profit community organization in the fullest sense of the term.

Mainly through the efforts of these groups, cooperation in the renewal work has been forthcoming from the city, local banks, the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel Institute of Technology (both are located nearby), the Greater Philadelphia Movement and the Board of Education (ground has been broken for a new 17-room elementary school in the village.)



One of more than fifty. . . . The before-and-after transformation of this mid-Victorian building in West Philadelphia's Powelton Village is repeated, with variations, in more than fifty other structures



in the area. Some \$11,000 in private money reclaimed this building, cutting the number of apartment units from 12 to eight.

Owners Pay the Bills

No federal funds have been used. All of the home rehabilitation has been carried on by the people and it is estimated by George N. Funderburg, treasurer of Powelton Village Development Associates (PVDA), that some \$250,000 has been spent on improvements so far.

The PVDA came into existence several years ago at a time when the area was slipping downhill. Many owners of the large stone-faced houses were fleeing to the suburbs; others were allowing their homes to deteriorate. A house sale usually meant conversion from one or two family occupancy to multiple residences.

At one point, a neighborhood apartment building was up for auction. A corporation was formed and a \$20,000 kitty raised to save the building from being chopped up into still smaller compartments. That project failed but the \$20,000 kitty later became the initial financing for PVDA.

As "For Sale" signs went up, the PVDA (along with other groups sympathetic with PVDA's aims) bought up the properties and arranged for their sale to persons who would cut down the num-

ber of dwelling units. The PVDA also operates 200 apartment units—75 of its own, 125 as agents for other owners—with no racial restrictions.

Although Powelton Neighbors has many firms in the community fire (folk dancing programs, science clubs, choirs, annual clean-up campaigns), one of its primary concerns is home improvement.

The non-profit, non-partisan neighborhood improvement group has been operating for four years. It is open to all tenants or home owners "willing to work with a vigorous neighbors' association for community improvement." Just how vigorous is attested by a \$1,000 award which it won in last year's Neighborhood Improvement Contest sponsored by the Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce.

PN holds monthly meetings every first Monday, with average attendance running about 100. Members receive a monthly newsletter. Dues are \$2 for individuals, \$3 for husband-wife and \$30 for contributing memberships.

On home improvement, PN has found its most effective tools are information and encouragement. Its primary concern

is to educate residents to the why's of rehabilitation and encourage them with the how's.

Dr. John Marshall, PN president, says the leaders do this by variations on across-the-fence promotion. Old-time residents are urged constantly to improve their homes and new people, with an eye on run-down homes which they want to salvage, are drawn into the village. Once old-timers and new-comers have renovated their homes, PN asks them to invite their neighbors in to see what can be achieved. The group also serves as a clearinghouse on information about contractors, costs of repairs and major overhauls. It gives, in this field, practical and critical reference.

Some 50 houses have been treated to major improvements over the last several years. Equally encouraging to Dr. Marshall and the PN is the Board of Education's decision to build a new elementary school right in the village. The PN suggested the site on which the school building will rise.

Another of PN's major efforts on the housing front has been to bring in Section 220 FHA mortgage insurance. The area

has been certified that the project is by no means an unqualified success.

Disappointment over the actual application of 120 mortgages is expressed by many leaders in the Powelton Village movement.

The actual granting of section 220 commitments has been thwarted by disagreement between applicants and the FHA as to the proper evaluation of the houses after rehabilitation. The issue has not been resolved.

Whatever FHA's future contribution may be, the Powelton Village movement thus far has several unique factors operating in its favor.

Dwight S. Bryant, chairman of the board of PVDA and director of community relations for the Philadelphia Housing Authority, says the most important is a local leadership which has pushed a vigorous program along on three fronts or once: 1) The handling of money, 2) the improvement of physical plant, and 3) intensive work with people.

Another is the proximity of the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel Institute and several major hospitals. All are within walking distance. One example of the support forthcoming from such institutions: Drexel has announced that it will participate in the purchase and restoration of PVDA's newest investment property through provision of a \$10,000 mortgage.

But the biggest asset to the Powelton Village movement from the educational and other institutions will probably come through the newly formed West Philadelphia Corporation. This group will seek an overall approach to West Philadelphia's problems in crime, recreation, schools, housing, traffic and the buying, improvement and resale of real estate.

Says Gaylord P. Harwell, University of Pennsylvania president: "What has happened in Powelton Village is especially interesting to the major institutions of West Philadelphia. We have recently banded together, in the West Philadelphia Corporation, to attack the problems of blight and to build a better environment for the future. Powelton Village is only one part of the greater University City which was eroded, but its example is both challenging and instructive to all of us."

Powelton Village's accomplishments, in fact, may make rehabilitation catching. Three other neighborhoods in Philadelphia are reportedly making plans to set up similar programs.

For more information on various projects mentioned in this article, write to:

Powelton Village Development Associates, 3661 Powelton Avenue, Philadelphia 4; Powelton Neighbors, write to Dr. Marshall at 3568 Hamilton Street, Philadelphia.

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The Powelton story is a remarkable record of the results which can be achieved by a determined and persistent group of neighbors, working together to improve their community at every level. Two features of this record strike me as most unusual. One is the fact that the people in Powelton have recognized the complexity of the problem of community renewal, without being intimidated by the size of the job. They have planned and executed campaigns for better local schools and for improved city services, they have fostered cultural and social activities which knit together their neighborhood, and they have, through their development corporation, put private investment capital to work at restoring an area of fine older homes.

The second feature of the record, which I am convinced accounts for the positive spirit of the community, is their recognition that everyone is needed to share the work. Distinctions of race, religion, economic or occupational class, have not prevailed, and the community is today, as a result, sounder and more dynamic than many wealthier areas.

Sincerely,

Gaylord P. Harwell

Commandments for Community Groups

- Know your community's problems and their causes.
- Involve the major interests in the area in solving them.
- Set up an office with professional staff at the earliest possible moment.
- Create understanding of the community's role in conservation and enlist as many individuals as possible in actual work.
- Develop volunteer leadership and make maximum use of it.
- Learn the step-by-step procedures in handling the factors contributing to deterioration and methods for dealing with panic, fear and tension involving different racial, cultural, and economic groups.
- Understand the laws applying to the community effort and the function of public departments, their powers, responsibilities, and limitations.
- Marshal the facts about community conditions, present them convincingly to authorities, and follow through until action is taken.
- Establish relations with public and private agencies in ways that will produce mutual respect and maximum cooperation.
- Give active leadership in creating the necessary instruments if they are not available, in bringing about reforms, and in providing public support for them.

(From a speech by Julia Abrahamson, former executive director of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference, Chicago.)